

Only Months Separated from a Security Breach at the Newark Airport, Adler Demands Government Step up Measures to Protect American Citizens

Washington, DC – Congressman John Adler, who represents families close to the Metropolitan New York and Philadelphia region, today applauded the Transportation Security Administration for tightening no-fly rules and requested an immediate Congressional Hearing concerning airport security. Only months removed from the security breach at the nearby Newark International Airport, Faisal Shahzad, who later confessed to an attempted bombing in Times Square, was allowed to board a foreign-bound flight. Thankfully, a final passenger list alerted the National Targeting Center to Mr. Shahzad's whereabouts several hours after he was added to the no-fly list.

"While law enforcement officials across the spectrum deserve praise for apprehending a terrorist so quickly, a known terror suspect still made it aboard a foreign-bound flight," Congressman John Adler said. "We caught the bad guy this time, but more work needs to be done to ensure the safety of our local families. The TSA's tightening of no-fly rules is a good first step, but in a post 9-11 environment, we must remain on the cutting-edge when it comes to law enforcement."

According to published media reports, at 12:30 PM, the Department of Homeland Security added Mr. Shahzad's name to a no-fly list. Minutes later, Emirates Airlines was given notice to check the latest no-fly list. By 4:30 PM, detailed information about the Times Square suspect was made available to airlines. Despite this information, Mr. Shahzad booked a flight at 6:30 PM, paid cash for a boarding pass by 7:35 PM, and got as far as the airport gates by 11 PM in an Emirates plane. Only a final passenger list fail-safe kept the flight grounded.

Despite the hard work of local law enforcement agencies, lapses remain in airport security. In particular, the Congressman asked for a hearing to discuss speeding up the timeline for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to take over the duties of making sure passengers on international flights are not on the no-fly list. Furthermore, the Congressman suggested requiring cash purchases of airline tickets reported to the TSA.

Full text of the letter to Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-MS) of the House Homeland Security Committee is below:

The Hon. Bennie G. Thompson

Chairman, House Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176 Ford HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson:

I write to request an investigatory hearing on how we can further tighten up airport security. The recent episode concerning the Times Square bombing attempt demonstrates how far our law enforcement has come since 9-11, and how much additional work remains to be done. A thorough investigative hearing will go a long way in preparing our airports to be better prepared against potential terrorist attacks, as well as help our law enforcement agencies capture known suspects and fugitives.

Thankfully, our law enforcement officials caught the Times Square suspect, but we could have had him hours earlier. I am particularly concerned that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) needs to immediately assume responsibility for checking for international-bound passengers on the no-fly list, and that the TSA needs to receive information on passengers that paid cash for a boarding pass. While requiring airlines to check the no-fly list more frequently is a good first step, this topic should be thought over considerably. I am also interested in the expert opinion of Homeland Security officials and researchers on what else we could have done to prevent the Times Square suspect from ever boarding a flight.

Only months after a major security breach at the Newark Airport, much work needs to be done in regards to airport security. This latest episode only serves to underscore this point. While our law enforcement officials deserve praise for apprehending the admitted Times Square conspirator and preventing harm to nearby families, our nation cannot afford to be complacent. I look forward to Congress holding a hearing in the near future on this critical topic.

Sincerely,

John Adler
Member of Congress